



August 16, 2005

KEY FACTS

ABOUT NEW JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA CRIMINAL JURY INSTRUCTIONS (CALCRIM)

- ▶ Chief Justice Ronald M. George appointed the original 29-member Task Force on Jury Instructions in 1997 to draft legally accurate jury instructions in plain English.
- ▶ This is part of the Judicial Council's eight-year campaign to reform California's jury system and encourage more jurors to participate in jury duty.
- ▶ The criminal instructions currently in use (CALJIC) were initially drafted in the 1930s and 1940s and contain often confusing legal terminology.
- ▶ The goals of the task force are to (1) ensure that jurors understand and apply the law correctly in their deliberations, and (2) make jurors' experiences more meaningful and rewarding.
- ▶ The criminal subcommittee of the task force consists of 15 legal professionals who have worked for eight years and have dedicated hundreds of hours to create these new instructions. In addition, hundreds of California judges, lawyers and legal scholars reviewed every draft of every instruction.
- ▶ The task force has drafted and edited these new criminal jury instructions and circulated them widely for public comment.
- ▶ The Judicial Council is scheduled to vote on these instructions on August 26, 2005. If approved, more than 700 new instructions will be effective January 1, 2006. They include all topics covered in current instructions and more.
- ▶ The new Judicial Council civil jury instructions (CACI) were approved on July 13, 2003. They have been available and in use since September 2003.
- ▶ Copies of the new criminal jury instructions (CALCRIM) will be made available to all judicial officers, free of charge, in print and electronic formats. To facilitate implementation and ease the transition, the Center for Judicial Education and Research will offer education programs to familiarize judges with the instructions.
- ▶ Only a few states have plain-English jury instructions. California's are the most comprehensive.
- ▶ The California judicial system is the largest of all of the states in the nation. Worldwide, it is second only to the U.S. federal judicial system.